

EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY AND
CONSUMERISM IN *FIGHT CLUB*

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by

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To my family and my husband

APPROVAL PAGE

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I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other
2. than that for which it is now submitted.
3. The program of this study of which this thesis is part has consisted of:
 - i) Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*
 - ii) Existentialist philosophy and Consumerism
4. I have followed the thesis style guides of Turkish universities and international universities as well as many relevant books published by university presses on this subject.

Asena ÇAY

October, 2011

ABSTRACT

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EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY AND CONSUMERISM IN *FIGHT CLUB*

This thesis will analyze the work of Chuck Palahniuk and his presence in existentialist philosophy and consumerism from the perspective of postmodernism focusing on his best known novel *Fight Club*. Palahniuk's work is not only a valuable literary work; but also with his work he attempted to criticize the influences of existentialism and materialism in the postmodern literary circle. The book refers to the obsession of consumerism and destruction of identity as a result of conventional norms of society. From this standpoint, Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy is offered as a challenge to any ideas derived from modernity and materialism. In addition to that, authors like Allen Ginsberg, Ralph Ellison, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac came to prominence after World War II. They protested the influences of materialism in their works. They emphasized the importance of existence and self-realization as a result of popular existentialism. Beat Literature had a significant influence on spreading existentialist philosophy. Jack Kerouac in particular was one of the leaders of the Beat Generation as a popular existentialist. Palahniuk focuses on the dynamics of identity in American life by emphasizing the influences of modern society toward personal transformation.

Key Words:

Existentialism, Consumerism, Chuck Palahniuk, Fight Club, Identity.

KISA ÖZET

Asena ÇAY

Ekim 2011

***DÖVÜŞ KULÜBÜ*'NDE VAROLUŞÇULUK FELSEFESİ VE TÜKETİMCİLİK**

Bu tez Chuck Palahniuk'un çalışmasını ve Palahniuk'un varoluşçuluk felsefesindeki yerini postmodern perspektiften *Dövüş Kulübü* üzerinden analiz etmektedir. Palahniuk'un çalışması sadece edebi bir çalışma olmayıp, aynı zamanda bu çalışmayla Palahniuk kitabında postmodern döngüde varoluşçuluk felsefesinin ve tüketimciliğin etkilerini de eleştirmektedir. Toplumun geleneksel normlarının bir sonucu olarak kitap, tüketimcilik akımı obsesyonuna ve kimlik bölünmesine değinmektedir. Bu bakış açısından, Jean Paul Sartre'ın varoluşçuluk felsefesi tüketicilik ve moderniteden kaynaklanan fikirlere karşı gelmektedir. Bunun yanı sıra, Allen Ginsberg, Ralph Ellison, William S. Burroughs, ve Jack Kerouac gibi yazarlar İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan sonra öne çıktılar. Eserlerinde materyalizmin etkilerini protesto ettiler. Popüler Varoluşçuluğun bir sonucu olarak varlığın ve kendini bilmenin önemini vurguladılar. Beat Edebiyatı varoluşçuluk felsefesinin yayılmasında önemli bir etkiye sahiptir. Özellikle Jack Kerouac Popüler Varoluşçuluk akımını destekleyerek, Beat Nesli'nin öncüsü olmuştur. Palahniuk, kişisel değişim açısından modern toplumun etkilerini vurgulayarak Amerikan hayat tarzındaki kimlik özelliklerinin üzerinde durur.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Varoluşçuluk, Tüketimcilik, Chuck Palahniuk, *Dövüş Kulübü*, Kimlik

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication Page.....	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Author Declarations.....	v
Abstract.....	vi
Kısa Özet.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	ix
Acknowledgements.....	x
Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER 1: SARTRE’S EXISTENTIALISM	
1.1. Freedom and Responsibility.....	8
1.2. Roquentin and Existentialist Individuality.....	10
1.3. Popular Existentialism and Outburst of The Consumer Man.....	14
CHAPTER 2: <i>FIGHT CLUB</i> BY CHUCK PALAHNIUK	
2.1. <i>Fight Club</i> and The Existential Hero.....	17
2.2. The Existential Character in <i>Fight Club</i>	17
2.3. <i>Fight Club</i> as a Reflection of Sartre’s Existentialist Philosophy.....	21

CHAPTER 3: TASTE OF CONSUMERISM

3.1. History of Consumption.....	27
3.1.a. Labor Union Movement.....	27
3.1.b. Surviving The Dust Bowl.....	28
3.2. Feel Good Consumerism and “Make a House a Home”.....	30
3.3. The Cross-Cultural Consumption and The IKEA Boy.....	31

CHAPTER IV: DESTRUCTION OF SELF-IDENTITY

4.1. Identity Problem.....	33
4.2. Influence of Postmodernity.....	36
4.3. Jack and The Consumer Man.....	38
Conclusion.....	41
Workscited.....	46

INTRODUCTION

“Truth is stranger than fiction” says the author of *Fight Club* who combines fantasy with personal experience in his novels (Palahniuk, 34). As a novelist, Chuck Palahniuk is best known for his award-winning novel *Fight Club*. Like his other works, *Fight Club* is a novel which takes place in the postmodernist literary circle. The book refers to excessive consumerism as a symbol of emotional emptiness and as a way of self-distinction. It addresses the values that society wants its people to embrace. Consumerism is the obsession of society with the acquisition of things which has created a dilemma in the modern era for a long time. Palahniuk’s works demonstrate that if the line between “wants” and “needs” isn’t defined, people confuse this line and the things they buy start to shape their characters or identities. In this way, the possessions become the whole point in their lives. In addition to that, they only live within the walls built by society and can’t see either themselves nor the outside.

Because Palahniuk’s characters are trapped by the norms and expectations of society in the postmodern era. The characters in *Fight Club* turn against society and search for self-identity, inner peace and personal freedom. While doing that, they expose the flaws of society at the same time. As they are dissatisfied with institutions or corporations, his characters are full of anger, destruction, and failure. *Fight Club* challenges the American consumer identity by forming two contrasting characters; Jack and Tyler. Jack is a typical consumer who is dependent on his possessions, while Tyler lives an independent life according to his own rules. Jack’s life is monotonous, boring, and without friends or family. To fill this emptiness, he buys more and more things. However, Tyler is the opposite of Jack. He is the person who lives however he wants. He lives in a tenement, he doesn’t work at a job he hates, and he wears the clothes that reflect his personality, not those that reflect the values of society, like a necktie. He questions all the norms that society holds dear. Throughout the book *Fight Club*, Tyler’s motto is “the things you own, end up owning you”. His characters are the ones born after 1965 who are called the “half generation”. It’s a generation formed of a group of people who have not developed a true identity or self. In an interview by Stephen Brown, Palahniuk says:

I think that the central, most American literary theme is the invention of self. We see it in *The Great Gatsby*; we see it in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*... It is such an American genre, this whole idea of reinventing and creating your self based

on your dream, or how you perceive yourself to be, or not to be... So I really wanted to play with that. (62)

According to Klemens, the author of *The Great Depression is Our Lives*, Palahniuk's works are associated with the Generation X culture (86). Members of this generation are alienated and disattached by the cultural influences of the time. "X" refers to the lack of identity that the generation experiences. This generation is detached from society and has an uncertain future. In *Fight Club* Jack's alter ego Tyler Durden wants to destroy the society that alienated him. Jack is full of hate and distrust toward corporate consumerism. In the same way that people of Generation X live a simulacrum in a world full of unrealities, Jack confuses the line between fiction and reality in a modern and violent society. Generation X struggles for independence, freedom, and self-identity. In *Fight Club*, Tyler and Jack demonstrate this struggle through starting their own method of self-development: establishing fight clubs. As their plan progresses, they look at Tommy Hilfiger and ask, "Is that what a man looks like?" (Palahniuk 82). They develop their own way of thinking and they don't feel they need the rules of society or family. They start to act the way they believe, not the way society believes. Tyler refers to Generation X by saying that they are the "middle children of history" (Palahniuk 64).

As a reaction to these major influences of modern society, existentialist philosophy offers a challenge to any ideas derived by civilization, modernity, and consumerism. This movement focuses on man's feelings, thoughts, actions, and choices. The nineteenth century philosopher Soren Kierkegaard is known as the father of existentialism. He and many other existentialist philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre wanted to reclaim the significance of individuality and freedom especially in the post-World War II years when people were suffering from depression and crisis. According to existentialist philosophy, in his book *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Sartre says that man is completely free and responsible for all of his actions (112). The main principle of existentialism is "existence precedes essence," which means the individual defines himself through choice, which leads to freedom, and responsibility. Because of this, man's existence is more significant than his essence. According to this philosophy, either man creates his own values by himself or by the impositions of society. Jean Paul Sartre later formulated this principle of existentialism by saying that the individual is determined by the things that surround him because he himself chooses and he is responsible for his actions. Sartre thinks that self-knowledge or self-

consciousness forms the essence or nature of an individual as this knowledge gives more freedom to perceive the world and individual identity in the search for meaning.

According to Ann Fulton, in her book *Apostles of Sartre: Existentialism in America*, she says World War II played an important role in shaping Sartre's ideas (66). Due to the influences of war, existentialists experienced such as loneliness, isolation, and distrust. They tried to find answers or solve the problem of "being an individual" or "the essence of the individual". Essence shows all the qualities that makes an individual "individual". Existentialist philosophy wants man to be aware of his emotions to take responsibility for his actions. According to Sartre, in his book *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, an individual is responsible and free as "he makes himself to be". His actions aren't caused by the other person, just by himself. This is the freedom of responsibility and choice (122). In his novel *Nausea*, Sartre emphasizes these existentialist issues through the character Roquentin. Roquentin tries to find meaning in his life by questioning all the things around him. He feels anxiety, depression, desire for freedom, and distrust toward the world. At the beginning, everything is boring, meaningless, and monotonous for him. After he meets Rollebon, he identifies with him and finds answers to his questions about existence through him. However, he starts to feel contradiction between two identities. He lives an identity crisis in his "existential choice" (63). He realizes the distance between society and himself. He becomes an outsider. Roquentin learns to observe himself and the world with a third eye. By this method, he realizes the essence of things and especially of himself. Sartre addresses existence through the mental struggle of his character (77).

In his works in American life which mirror modern society's idea of how people should behave or act. His characters experience an identity transformation. In *Fight Club*, while the protagonist Jack's identity is homogenous at first, he turns into a destructive and powerful identity after a self-awareness. This awareness provides a different point of view and perspective on the consumerist world. Jack becomes the representation of the act of self-expression in the book. Through this analysis, Jack is transformed from a member of a herd into a free individual by living through the most significant change he has ever had in his life. At the point when his house blows up, he meets Tyler, he fights Tyler and starts to become Tyler. He meets a new kind of release out of the herd. In the book *Fight Club Politics*, Juliet Eilperin says that starting with the idea that things define who you are, for instance blue-collar workers in society work in crappy jobs where they aren't appreciated or well paid (14). They work at jobs they hate. They feel societal oppression. At this point, Tyler uses fight club to

make men realize the reality. By this method, he wants them to understand that they don't need possessions anymore and their jobs don't define who they are. After these men begin to fight, they influence the men who want to break down the social order. Then fight clubs spread more and more, and protest increases around the country.

In addition, after World War II, the Beat Generation played a significant role in bringing existentialist philosophy into American literature. Authors such as Allen Ginsberg, Ralph Ellison, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac came to prominence during the 1950s. They turned against the conventional social norms of modernism in the postwar period. They underlined freedom and self-realization in their works. Particularly Jack Kerouac was one of the pioneers of Beat literature. In his book *On the Road*, his two characters go on a journey across America to seek the meaning of life. Unwittingly, they search for "self fulfillment" by trying to prove their existence both to themselves and other people who were influenced by the norms of modernism in the postwar period.

"Self-destruction" is one of the main aspects of existentialist philosophy. When one begins to question his existence, first he will understand the meaning of pain, sacrifice, and destruction. Through pain, a reborn and living body arises. It's not only about physical pain but also about psychological pain. In *Fight Club*, at the beginning Palahniuk shows us the physical pain of Jack. He has insomnia and can't sleep well. Step by step it is seen that he has both physical and psychological problems. The main reason of his insomnia lies in his psychological depression. When he joins the support group on the advice of his doctor, he can sleep well at night. In the support group, he cries with a man named Bob who has cancer. After that, he feels himself relieved and sleeps without thinking about his problems. He understands that crying is a kind of sacrifice, and without sacrifice, he won't find relief. He decides to establish a fight club with Tyler for that reason. Even though fighting gives men in the club pain, it also makes them free from their problems. They become reborn.

After the clubs, Tyler uses Project Mayhem assignments called "human sacrifices". The aim of human sacrifices is to start a better life through the threat of death. The main idea in this project is if you died right now, what would you wish you had done with your life? Whatever you wish you had done, you have to save yourself from your valueless and oppressed position in society. As Joe realizes what he himself is becoming, he understands that destruction is destruction and that he is responsible for the breakdown of his life. He sees that there is a battle going on inside himself. He knows that nothing is static. He learns the

meaning of pain first through joining support groups. He discovers that even he doesn't care about the problems in his job. After that, he creates an underground world with Tyler. The members of the club feel power, confidence, freedom, and self esteem when they fight. The club releases men from jobs where they are underappreciated or low paid and live an average lifestyle. They become men who want to be free from society's control and they understand that their choices determine their lives. Palahniuk tells this while talking about his one of childhood memories with his father in Stephen Brown's book *Consuming Books: The Marketing and Consumption of Literature*:

As a child my father impressed upon me that if you're going to do stupid things you are going to have to pay the price. Once he actually threatened to chop off my finger with an axe for something I'd done. And at that moment it became incredibly clear to me that I'm a cause in my own life, that I had to take responsibility for myself for the rest of my life, and not blame anyone for the things that I did... (58)

In *Fight Club*, when Jack moves near Tyler, Tyler shows his own tenement and Jack's condo. He demonstrates the differences of choices between them. And he says that they are responsible for what they choose. After Jack becomes Tyler, he discovers that he constructs his essence through "choosing". Tyler is the ideal model man who is aware of everything around him. Palahniuk asserts issues such as destruction, consumerism, self-awareness, and essence through states of struggle. When Jack wants to get rid of his alter ego Tyler, he tries to escape but Tyler says that he created him and he has to take some responsibility.

The *Fight Club* focuses on two kinds of people. One kind isn't aware of the influences of society and lives in a monotonous way, and the other group is aware of everything in the underground world of Tyler. Palahniuk uses the first point of view in *Fight Club*. All events are told through his eyes. He forms a fractured narrative as he talks both as a narrator and as Tyler Durden. The reader can't understand which thoughts belong to the narrator and which thoughts belong to Tyler. In addition to that, Palahniuk uses very short sentences. Within each chapter the time line moves backward immediately with a lot of flashbacks. While reading, the reader wonders where the next line will start again. Also, the beginning of the book is like the end of the story. By using these features, Palahniuk reflects contemporary influences in his writing style.

In the book *Stranger than Fiction: True Stories*, Palahniuk says that as Jack becomes more and more Tyler, he and the members of the club realize how they are disintegrated and deny their identities because of the influences of consumerism. Their awareness increases their disobedience. While they are destroying some parts of their lives, they actually rebuilding those destroyed parts. By this method, Jack exposes the identity crises of the men in the club. He wants them to see that they are “by-products of a life-style obsession” (Palahniuk 58). Only through destruction and pain, Jack thinks, he can have a name, a self-realization. Jack begins to set rules for the clubs; he tests the resistance of new members as the fight clubs spread all around the country. However, as he becomes Tyler more and more, he realizes that everything starts to go out of control. He sees that all the things he thought are done by Tyler are really done by him. He wants to get rid of his split personality, but he can’t. He constantly repeats the same things such as “you are not your name”, “you are not your family”. The Mayhem Project and the clubs get out of control as well as each person acts independently. He doesn’t know what to do. At the end he finds himself in a mental hospital.

Chuck Palahniuk addresses existentialism as a response to the post-modern syndrome of the corporate machine in America in his award-winning novel *Fight Club*. Palahniuk gives insight into the kind of life a consumer society lives and what the results of it are. Each event in *Fight Club* offers a unique aspect of existence as experienced in or observed by the author. As a post-modern author, Palahniuk portrays the social disaster through his character Jack. He also creates the character Tyler Durden, who is the alter ego of Jack. He demonstrates the struggle to ‘exist’ in the revolutionary character of Jack’s transformation into Tyler Durden. This study is mainly based on the philosophy of existentialism under the key aspect self-destruction in *Fight Club*. The thesis tries to evaluate how Chuck Palahniuk is affected by Sartre’s existentialism as a post modern irony through the introspective journey of his characters. Palahniuk also focuses on a journey to self. In the book of Brian Jarvis *Contemporary American Novel in Context*, for the transformation process, Palahniuk says that without self-destruction, nothing can be built upon a personality (150). Through the characters Jack and Tyler, Palahniuk pits extreme individualism and an identity crisis against each other. In the world, everything is “a copy of a copy of a copy”: the author shows triumph and defeat, satisfaction and desire, in the development of a personality in a white-collar corporate culture.

This thesis will demonstrate that *Fight Club* is a continuation in late twentieth century American literature from the European existentialist school of thought, and that American

notions such as self-destruction and self-creation. These ideas of existentialist philosophers show the definition of existence and also the direct opposition to post-modern consumerist society.

CHAPTER I

SARTRE'S EXISTENTIALISM

1.1. Freedom and Responsibility

Existentialism is a school of philosophy applied to the work of many nineteenth and twentieth century philosophers who submit that the individual is free and responsible for all of his actions. Existentialist ideas emerged again in the post-world war years when people had a gloomy picture of life following the Great Depression and World War II. After World War II existentialism was deeply influenced journalism, literature, and cinema. These works reflected the existentialists' loneliness, isolation, and distrust towards the "uncaring" universe. Although the war-era writers are connected to existentialism, it started much earlier. Existentialism can be seen as the individual's opposition to loneliness. Civilization's distrust in religious and social order focused on individual responsibility. It is important to mention the portrayal of the existentialist individual. As Garcy Olson says in his *Composition Theory for the Postmodern Classroom*:

Frustration, insecurity, and painful striving are the inescapable lot of humankind, and the only life worth living is one in which this fact is squarely faced; for, if the existentialists are right, a life of frustration, insecurity, and painful striving itself generates values, and the values so generated are the only ones actually realizable and genuinely worthy of human pursuit. (14)

As Hazel Estella Barnes argued in her book *Sartre, in the Age of Rationalism* when it was believed that rationality would answer all questions such as "the questions of ethics, the questions of economics, the questions of sociology and politics since man is the man of intellect, he placed his faith in the rationale of the laws of mathematics" (13). As man kept going toward the nineteenth century, the desires, emotions, and feelings of man needed to be expressed. Philosophers like the Romantics, Naturalists, Realists, and Existentialists emerged. Some of them claimed that the problems would be solved only through using imagination. And some of them asserted that artists' unique responsibility was to display the form of nature as it exists. Thus, from the Renaissance and through some five or six hundred years man has struggled to solve the same problem: being an individual or nature of essence.

There are certain characteristics of an individual connected to his mind, body, and spirit, and each characteristic is different from the others. Thus, the individual man is unique. Man as a species also has characteristics: “the ability to build fire, to make tools, to pass intellectual judgements, to evaluate his past and present, to speculate on the supernatural, and to organize his world of experience in the categories of love, play, religion, and work. These are common qualities of the essence of that which makes up man, collectively” Hazel Estella Barnes says in her book *Sartre* (18). These qualities of man determines the nature, the *essence* of man. Thus, essence means “the specific list of qualities which make man “man” and which further differentiate man from other beings, animate or inanimate” (Barnes, 18). This philosophy is exemplified perfectly in Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*. As a post-modern author, Chuck Palahniuk focuses on the philosophy of existentialism in *Fight Club*. The main character Jack wants to transform into his alter ego, Tyler Durden. He is his ideal man. In the process of transformation, he learns how to ‘Become’. *This* is the evolution of existentialism. While becoming this ideal, he experiences an identity crisis in his existential journey. He begins to accept that he will first fail and but in the end he will triumph. This will be discussed in further detail later.

In his book *Existentialism* Thomas Flynn says, “in the twentieth century, one imagines offbeat, avant-garde intellectuals, attached to their cigarettes, listening to jazz as they hotly debate the implications of their newfound political and artistic liberty. The mood is one of enthusiasm, creativity, anguished self-analysis, and freedom - always freedom” (4). According to existentialists, an individual has responsibility for the acts of free will. Although existentialism developed after World War II, its influence continued in later years as well. The origin of existentialism started with Soren Kierkegaard in the first half of the 19th century. Kierkegaard gave the first philosophical significance to the term “existence”.

Following World War II, existentialism became a well-known philosophical and cultural movement. In the twentieth century, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and Husserl affected Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir. Besides these philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche and Miguel de Unamuno were the important existentialist leaders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Existentialist philosophers emphasized that human nature is determined by life choices. They focused on the question of human existence.

According to Steven Earnshaw, “Existentialism is a philosophy that takes as its starting point the individual’s existence. Everything that it has to say, and everything that it believes can be said of significance – about the world we inhabit, our feelings, thoughts, knowledge, ethics - stems from this central, founding idea” (3). Existentialism was a reaction against conventional and abstract understandings of human behaviour. It focuses on the individual’s consciousness, meaning the individual’s awareness of reality, feelings, and emotions. By this method, existentialism emphasizes the responsibility and limitations of ‘existential individuality’ as “we are born biological beings but we must become existential individuals by accepting responsibility for our actions. This is an applicaiton of Nietzsche’s advice to ‘become what you are’. Many people never do acknowledge such responsibility but rather flee their existential individuality into the comfort of the faceless crowd” (Flynn, 4).

Jean Paul Sartre, who was born in 1905, was one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century. Affected by the ideas of Soren Kierkegaard, Frederich Nietzsche, and Edmund Husserl, Sartre developed the philosophical movement called “existentialism”. In his *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre defines existentialism by saying “Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards” (18). According to Sartre’s existentialist philosophy:

Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” which is the first principle of existentialism; second is ‘time is of the essence’; third is ‘humanism’ means existentialism is a personal centered philosophy. Fourth is ‘freedom/responsibility’ means existentialism is a philosophy of freedom. Its basis is the fact that we can stand back from our lives and reflect on what we have been doing. In this sense, we are always “more” than ourselves. But we are as responsible as we are free. Fifth is ‘ethical considerations are paramount’, which means though each existentialist understands the ethical, as with ‘freedom’, in his or her own way, the underlying concern is to invite us to examine the authenticity of our personal lives and of our society. (Flynn, 11)

1.2. Roquentin and Existentialist Individuality

Sartre says that identity of any one person – essence - can not be found by examining other people’s identities, but only by himself. Because an individual’s actions aren’t ‘caused’ by anyone else; this is the freedom of responsibility and choice. In his novel *Nausea*, Sartre asserts his ideas about existentialism. In the novel, the protagonist Antoine Roquentin keeps a

diary. He lists every detail, every insignificant fact or feeling happening inside himself and the outside world in that diary. Roquentin focuses on the existence of objects and people. He questions the term “existence”. Sartre’s novel *Nausea* focused on the themes of fear and despair that define the loss of faith in the twentieth century: “She suffers as a miser. She must be miserly with her pleasures, as well. I wonder if sometimes she doesn’t wish she were free of this monotonous sorrow, of these mutterings which start as soon as she stops singing, if she doesn’t wish to suffer once and for all, to drown herself in despair. In any case, it would be impossible for her: she is bound” (11). Sartre focuses on sorrow and by that method, he questions existentialism as well.

He emphasizes that everything a person smells, tastes, touches are the creation of the observer. Roquentin calls this *Nausea*. For him, everything is meaningless and there is no reason to exist: “The dark street does not end, it loses itself in nothingness. It is not between the walls, it is nowhere. And there is consciousness of a stifled voice which says: ‘The Self-Thought Man is wandering through the city’” (170). Sartre by this way determines the nature of change. In the novel, even Roquentin communicates with people or objects, he can’t find answers to his questions because he doesn’t feel himself free when he communicates with somebody or something. Sartre focuses on the main existentialist idea: anxiety, anguish, freedom, and self-deception. When Roquentin touches a stone, he says he feels nothing. But then he confesses that something causes him to lie to himself since, “he is not in the habit of telling himself what happens to him,” which is ‘self-deception’. Then he realizes that individual’s choice is not objective because each individual is different and can’t be obliged by laws, traditions, and cultures. So they have a right to do whatever they want, but they have to accept responsibility for their actions. The fear and hesitation in that responsibility lead them to hide their freedom by deceiving themselves, by lying to themselves.

In *Nausea*, Roquentin meets Rollebon. Through this meeting, through the presence of Rollebon, he discovers the existential theme of duality. He realizes both his own consciousness and the “other” part of himself that observes this consciousness. Roquentin’s dualistic identity allows him to observe himself: “There is a white hole in the wall, a mirror. It is a trap. I know that I am going to let myself be caught in it. I have” (Sartre, 16). “The mirror is the ‘trap’ of the I, the trap of believing that I-identity can be reified and objectified into an image, an *eidōs*, an essence [...]. People who live in society have learned how to see themselves in mirrors as they appear to their friends” (18). By this way “he castigates seeing yourself as others see you, accepting their objectification by internalizing their reification,

absorbing as your own identity the gaze of the other. The mirror image in *Nausea* thus exposes the crisis of identity” (Judaken, 34). When Roquentin realizes his own consciousness and the “other” part of himself or herself that observes this consciousness, he discovers the importance of “existential choice”. Kierkegaard explains,

Think of the captain on his ship at the instant when it has to come about. He will perhaps be able to say “I can either do this or that”; but in case he is not a pretty good navigator, he will be aware at the same time that the ship is all the while making its usual headway, and that therefore it is only an instant when it is indifferent whether he does this or that. So it is with a man. If he forgets to take account of the headway, there comes at last an instant when there no longer is any question of an either/or, not because he has chosen but because he has neglected to choose, which is equivalent to saying, because others have chosen for him, because he has lost his self. (78)

Because of his nausea, one night Roquentin realizes that he can’t see any object’s essence, only an increasing “nothingness”. When he understands that everything is meaningless, he struggles to find a purpose to his life in the present. But he realizes that the present is going like the past as well. The present is over just as soon as it has started. “For Sartre, the being through which nothingness comes to being must itself be nonbeing in its very structure; only thus could it bring about a nonbeing within the very fabric of being” (Catalano, 67). Catalano explains this nothingness by giving examples from Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*:

When I ask “What is a tree?” I remove or negate, the tree from the totality of nature in order to question it as a distinct entity. Also, when I question the nature of a tree, I must have a certain “distance” within myself that allows the tree to reveal itself to me. It is this “nothingness” within myself that both separates the tree as this *thing* within nature and allows me to be aware of the tree. (68)

Sartre questions the nature of a tree. The nature, the essence of objects and people is really important for him. When he realizes the essence of objects, he understands that nothing is static. The basic concepts of Sartre’s point of view about the world are “the being-in-itself” and “the being-for-itself”. The first one is *object*, the second one is *subject*. The being-in-itself is defined by its physical features, but the subject is defined by consciousness or abstract characteristics. Thomas Flynn explains this by emphasizing “existential individuality”:

It is commonly acknowledged that existentialism is a philosophy about the concrete individual. This is both its glory and its shame. In an age of mass communication and mass destruction, it is to its credit that existentialism defends the intrinsic value of what its main proponent Sartre calls the “free organic individual”, that is, the flesh-and-blood agent. Because of the almost irresistible pull toward conformity in modern society, what we shall call “existential individuality” is an achievement [...]. (6)

According to Sartre, in the existentialist portrayal of man, every object around an individual shows the meaning of nothingness. James Garvey gives an example about that in his book *The Twenty Greatest Philosophy Books*; “tables and chairs, oceans and trees, pebbles and planets, are all made of a substance that has being-in-itself (or, which is in itself). That is to say that they just are: they do not depend on our awareness of them, or on God or anything similar, and they just are what they are” (147). Nothingness has roots in an alienated world as well because “self is a temporal process, one can be alienated from oneself, say, through self-deception about one’s past or denial of responsibility for one’s future; one can also lose oneself in the absorption and preoccupation of everyday public existence” Lewis Gordon says (5). Heidegger explains the individual’s existence as homeless, because we have departed “being”. Through modern technology, a new relation between individuals and the world emerged. Modern technology has created an identity crisis. Since religious goals are no longer meaningful for individuals struggling with alienation.

According to Lewis Gordon in his book *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, existence comes into view to Roquentin, “as an undifferentiated stuff, without purpose or meaning. As a conscious being in an undifferentiated plenitude of being, Roquentin is a stranger in the universe, alienated by the failure of finding a meaning for himself or for the world. That absence of meaning is why the human condition is forlorn or abandoned” (6). In his *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre says that man is lost in the universe since consciousness is alienated from its self-identity. The consciousness of a man forms existentialism and existentialism of man creates existence and the existence of man forms consciousness since man exists by his experience; which he can know and feel only within himself. So his freedom is made up of his own “choosing” (102).

1.3. Popular Existentialism and Outburst of The Consumer Man

Existentialism in 1950s and 1960s experienced a shift toward popular existentialism as a result of feeling alone in the world of mass production and consumption. Jack Kerouac addresses to this popular existentialism by resisting the system of mass consumption which starts to shape the 'new' society. According to popular existentialism, man lives a division between the world he communicates with and himself. Popular existentialism demonstrated a resistant tendency to the dream of an affluent society and to an abundant life. It embraced the existentialist ideas such as alienation, loneliness, freedom and constant search for the meaning of existence.

At that time, existentialist thinkers adopted the popular existentialist thought to their arts. Jack Kerouac reflected this thought to his fiction. In his fictions he referred to existentialist themes such as free will, personal identity, emptiness, alienation, and loneliness. As consumerism increased obsession of people with mass consumption, the people who embraced existentialist idea searched for alternative life-styles different from the world of consumerism. Kerouac's characters searched for this another way of life by escaping from the materialistic world. They experienced an existential crisis between the consumerist and existential worlds. This was the fight against the high cost of living and development of material well-being. They were also in quest for personal fulfillment through the pursuit of an existential life style. Kerouac's characters experienced rural wilderness, deserts, forests by escaping from the material world. They had a desire to break their limitations and find freedom.

The fast material wealth and industrial development from 1960s until now forced existential characters to live just one way out: escape. The authors who embraced the idea of popular existentialism tried different and various ways to show the conflict between man and the consumer world in their books. Like Jack Kerouac, Chuck Palahniuk referred to popular existentialist themes through the character of Jack in his *Fight Club*. Palahniuk demonstrated the outburst of consumer man who lived a dilemma between his inside and the outside world. His character Jack escaped from that world by fighting in the clubs and living a simple and 'straight' life. As it is seen, consumerism is the basic theme of existentialism. As the industrial world developed toward material wealth, the shape of existentialism changed in direct proportion to consumerism as well.

In the following, the origin of American consumerism from the beginning of industrialization until our age will be looked at in detail with direct proportion to the conflict; how people first embraced the consumerism and then how they sought different ways to get out of the influences of it.

In American Literature, the influences of Sartre's existentialist philosophy are seen in the Beat Generation. As Jean Paul stresses in his book *Being and Nothingness*, existentialism emphasizes the idea of free will, freedom of choice, and personal responsibility (34). This point of view focuses on the unique experiences of each person and the responsibility of each individual for their choices and what they make of their essence. In American literature, during the 1950s a group of American writers emerged called the Beat Generation. The main aspects of Beat culture included experimentation with drugs, homosexuality, being different, and a rejection of materialism. Beat culture continues to exist today. Authors such as Allen Ginsberg, Ralph Ellison, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac came to prominence in Beat literature. In their works they focused on liberation and expression of anti-conformist identities. The term "Beat Generation" was introduced by Jack Kerouac to idealize an 'underground' means of expression. Beat Generation writers tried to emphasize what the world is and where a man belongs in it. These authors were influenced by existentialist ideas. They opposed civilization, industrialism, and the corporate machine in America. According to the Beat Generation, everyone should hear "the yearning of human souls" (Kerouac, 56). In their works they rejected conventional social values. The most popular beat novel, Kerouac's *On the Road* was written in 1951. The book encouraged a struggle for personal fulfillment through pursuit of an existential way of life. In his book he talks about self-realization of his character. His character rejects any reinforcement based on a social norm. He emphasized human existence and choices that shaped essence.

The Beat Generation picked many things up from existentialist sources. His character tries to exist against the continual passing of life. In his book *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac saw the Beat revolution as a defiance against the conformity of the corporate world in the postwar era (110). For Kerouac and other Beats, what is most significant is that the human mind becomes completely aware of its existence and choices within the present moment. Kerouac's characters Sal and Dean questioned the meaning in the spontaneous joy of life in his book. They try to find the "magic land" where they can survive and live their dreams. While they were searching for their dream land, they searched their own selves both in their spiritual and external journeys. Palahniuk's *Fight Club* shares the same mood of despair and unfulfillment

with the Beat Generation. Kerouac talks about a conversation with John Clellon Holmes where they both were “sitting around trying to think up the meaning of the Lost Generation and the subsequent Existentialism” (122). Kerouac was aiming to describe what could be thought of as a sort of 'exalted exhaustion'. The members of the Beatniks, or the generation now known as the Beat generation, exhausted themselves in the pursuit of such exalted or elevated heights as attempting to understand the meaning of existence. According to John Clellon Holmes in his book *Representative Men: The Biographical Essays*, Beatniks shaped their major aims according to existential philosophy in their search for meaning: “what makes existentialism so relevant to the Beatniks is that both groups find themselves in a post war social situation where systems building has irrevocably broken down” (227). Both Beatniks and existentialists tried to explore meaning in a meaningless world and escape alienation in the postwar period to reach a real expression of identity. Existentialism’s focus on “choice” had a great influence on the American Beat authors. The Beat Generation played an important role in spreading existential philosophy to post modern American literature.

From long years, man is struggling to find the true solution and right answers to the questions about “existentialism” as the world changes from that time to today. Many artists, philosophers, and writers reflected existential philosophy in their works. Sartre formed the basic ideas of his existential philosophy of by emphasizing the essence, responsibility, freedom of choice, and nothingness. In his novel *Nausea*, the protagonist realizes that as he experiences the things he sees, touches, smells, he discovers a new thing. Since there is a disorder in continuous change, “it is a matter of thinking the renewal of the self, of the individual, his very own self-renewal” (Tymieniecka, 38).

CHAPTER II

FIGHT CLUB BY CHUCK PALAHNIUK

2.1. Fight Club and The Existential Hero

“And what shall it profit a man,
if he gain the whole world,
and lose his own soul?”

(Matt. 16:26)

Palahniuk's *Fight Club* addresses the influences of materialism on the lives of people. It criticizes the consumer society by suggesting that the goal of consumer society is to make people believe that one day they will become rich. Individualism reinforces self-interest and materialism. The attitudes, desires, and values of consumerism are a powerful force in the individualist way of life. Existentialist philosophy emerged as a response to a materialist world which was full of images of chaos, injustice, suffering, and alienation. Pursuit of consumerism becomes the highest goal in the fallen lives of people. They don't realize that the struggle for earning more and more money leads them to illusion, madness, tragedy, and distrust. They try to find certainty in the power of material wealth. People's existences are torn by all of these consumerist dynamics. In *Fight Club*, Palahniuk addresses to the heights of materialism and the depths of existentialism by exploring the contradicting and complicated attitudes and approaches of the individuals.

2.2. The Existential Character in *Fight Club*

According to George Cotkin in his book *Existential America*, *Fight Club* focuses on the ambiguity of reality and truth which refers to one of the main aspects of existentialism (230). Jack's existence “precedes his essence” which is the main principle of Sartre's existentialist philosophy; he is the *essence* of man in *Fight Club* because he is the man as society describes what man is. He has a house with IKEA furniture, all the things that society tells him should make him happy. He faces a set of challenges and dilemmas that are imposed on him by society. Tyler Durden expresses the idea that former generations were described by the wars they fought. Through these fights and wars, philosophy of confusion and the acceptance of consumerist point of view rised. Because people defined themselves by what

they own instead of what they believe or fight for. This dilemma between action and belief as a means of defining 'essence' is reflected in *Fight Club*. Before Jack meets Tyler Durden, he was living in his constructed 'essence'. However, once he meets Tyler, Jack has to make decisions about all the things he comes across in his life. In his *Being and Nothingness*, one of the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre is "man chooses his own self" (59). In *Fight Club*, Jack begins to construct his own self by 'choosing'. We follow his existential journey through his choices. He lives an ambiguity between two personalities; Jack and Tyler. There is a veil in front of Jack and he can't see the real world. While Jack is trying to find his 'essence', he sees that Tyler has already created his own essence.

Tyler is Jack's subconscious or alter ego. Not only Jack begins to create his own essence but also he creates an image of man as he thinks he ought to be. Jack is lonely, his hobbies are just furnishing his house and keeping every piece of material polished. By himself, he says, "Then you're trapped in your lovely nest", he realizes, "and the things you used to own, now they own you." (Palahniuk, 44) But his self-realization doesn't go any further. This makes him worse because he is aware of his own stupidity, but is unable to change anything. While he is in a desperate situation, his mind, his subconscious attaches with Tyler Durden. Tyler destroys the things Jack has to set his essence, his soul free. He says that only when people lose everything, they have the power to do anything. As it is seen in the novel, consumerism eats up every aspect of human lives, leaving emotional emptiness and a lack of self-distinction behind. After Tyler destroys Jack's possessions, he becomes disappointed and gets shocked. Tyler wants Jack to question his consumer identity. So Tyler becomes an escape from that identity. Jack looks at a Gucci advertisement and says, "I feel sorry for the men that waste their time in fitness clubs to try and look like what Calvin Klein or Tommy Hilfiger think they should look like" (Palahniuk, 102). Tyler says that "self-destruction" is the answer. By that method, Tyler explains how people destruct their own identities through the mass media and advertisement they are fed their consumer identity. In *Fight Club*, for instance, IKEA furniture is the only escape for Jack. In the beginning of his meeting Tyler, Tyler warns Jack by saying:

Warning: If you are reading this then this warning is for you. Every word you read of this useless fine print is another second off your life. Don't you have other things to do? Is your life so empty that you honestly can't think of a better way to spend these moments? Or are you so impressed with authority that you give respect and credence to all that claim it? Do you read everything

you're supposed to read? Do you think everything you're supposed to think? Buy what you're told to want? Get out of your apartment. Stop the excessive shopping. Quit your job. Start a fight. Prove you're alive." (165)

After this warning, Jack begins to find ways to overcome his emotional and spiritual emptiness such as going to the support groups for cancer victims. Tyler shows him that he doesn't need materials to live but he needs self-destruction and the collapse of society in order to exist. Jack's inner self is "IKEA nesting instinct" which is chained. Tyler gives an example from his own life which is familiar to most of the people in the contemporary society:

Tyler: My dad never went to college, so it was really important that I go.
Jack: Sounds familiar.

Tyler: So I graduate, I call him up long distance, I say "Dad, now what?"

He says, "Get a job".

Jack: "Same here."

Tyler: Now I'm 25, make my yearly call again. I say "Dad, now what?"

He says, "I don't know, get married." (176)

Jack follows Tyler's advice and he himself refers to that following as "enlightenment". Tyler wants Jack to understand that consumerism stops people searching for the meaning of their life and of course their self-destruction. Because only through rejecting and destructing the "self" society describes, a person can liberate himself. Tyler Durden criticizes people who follow "conventional" goals since these goals are defined by society. So these goals become a barrier for the self-improvement. So Tyler and Jack represent the rebel and discontent against the "conformity" of contemporary America. They become the survivors of "the middle children of history". Palahniuk refers to Generation X culture with 'middle children'. It is the generation born after World War II and baby boom. Members of this generation is alienated and disattached by the cultural effects of the time. "X" addresses to the lack of identity that generation lives. This generation is alienated from society and feels distrust toward future. In *Fight Club* Jack's alter ego has a desire to prove his 'being' or his 'existence' to the society that disintegrated him.

In the world “everything is a copy of a copy of a copy” Jack lives in the same surreality as well. They move from nothingness and fruitless search to meaning and self-improvement. Men lose their primary role as producers in the society as a result of consumerism. In the novel Chuck Palahniuk calls fight club “Project Mayhem” as it refers to the need to rebel against certain aspects of society, especially against conventional social rules. Through fight club they rebel against what society regards as normal and perfect. Project Mayhem is a desire of protest to be against or disobedient to any authority. Because first of all *Fight Club* is a typical reflection of contemporary society. In the club men fight and assault each other while the outside world remains the same. In the book *You don't Talk about Fight Club: I am Jack's Completely Unauthorized Essay Collection*, Palahniuk describes Tyler's situation as; “he plays the devil's advocate against society... Tyler's motivation is perhaps to be against something, anything” (122). After Tyler and Jack started a business called the Paper Street Soap Company, they decided to go against the rules of the society. As an expression of their disobedience to society they undermines low-class jobs. Jack constantly thinks about how his life has always been miserable because he does what society tells him to do. Then, Jack stops working as a next rule for Project Mayhem.

In the consumer society people search for self-fulfillment in brandnames and as human beings they are defined as “byproducts of lifestyle obsession.” In *Fight Club*, Tyler explains this obsession by saying; “Goddammit, an entire generation pumping gas, working tables, the slaves of the white collars. Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need. Our war is spiritual” (Palahniuk, 67). In order to get rid of the “byproducts of lifestyle obsession”, they go through a near-surrealistic escape to an underground boxing club. Men from all corners of society come together to beat the snot out of each other. Men are finally able to shake off the paralyzed, suffocated, half-sleep state of being lead by consumerist and commercialist motivations. They feel the wild electricity of being alive, the power of knowing who they are, the clarity to see what really matters and a total indifference to and disregard for the images of masculinity that Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger put in front of them. When the fight is over, they are rejuvenated and on some level, reborn. However, nothing changes, says Palahniuk. Because they don't come to club just to fight. They go there to grasp anything.

You weren't alive anywhere like you were there. But Fight Club only exists in the hours between when Fight Club starts and Fight Club ends... Who you were in Fight Club was not who you were in the rest of the world... Fight Club wasn't about winning or losing... When the fight was over, nothing was solved, but nothing mattered. Afterwards we all felt saved. (Palahniuk, 89)

2.3. *Fight Club* as a Reflection of Sartre's Existentialist Philosophy

The *Fight Club* is the combination of the alienated and the alienation experience. As Sartre says in his *Existentialism is a Humanism*, "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world –and defines himself afterwards" (69), then he starts to take responsibility for the things he does which is 'existence precedes essence'. Because Sartre says that all human culture reconciliates between two realms; existence and consciousness. As a result of lack of incompleteness, people fill nothingness with being. As it is seen in the *Fight Club*, men escape to underground to relieve and fulfill their incompleteness. In addition to that, Jack makes himself relief through consuming, buying things for his house. Filling this nothingness is the main goal of modernity. The nothingness would be completed through progress, modernity. Mass production is one of the best examples for that progress. For instance, Jack can't give up the IKEA style. It defines his life-style as well. IKEA is related to mass-produced modernism. After Jack meets Tyler, he realizes that he is what he makes himself to be. Modernism identifies his whole life; his "existence precedes his essence". Life is a constantly repeated question about who you are and whether you have the courage to be that person. In his book *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Sartre says that "to cease to choose is to cease to be" (83), while Kierkegaard adds to that "to be is to choose oneself". That is, unless one gets one's personal identity and describes it, one stops to exist in any form at all.

In the other principle of Sartre's existentialism, "humanism" is a significant aspect of existentialism. In his book *Existentialism is a Humanism*, according to Sartre, existentialism is a "man-centered" philosophy (38). Because it focuses on the individual's search for identity and meaning under the pressure of mass society. For instance, in the fight club's Project Mayhem, Jack wants to do something for the people who feel themselves insignificant and helpless. Tyler tries to show them that the world thinks they are trash. He wants them to awake and show the world that they have power. The author refers to them as 'space monkeys', because they just unconsciously perform their jobs. Tyler wants them to learn what

he aims to destroy the society. They say, “May I never be complete. May I never be content. May I never be perfect. Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete” (Palahniuk, 102). He tries to show them how they become isolated and man-centered through modernism. With the aim of that, Jack and Tyler establishes the fight club as a fantasized underground escape. After a while, fight club becomes popular and Tyler starts fight clubs all over the country.

About the other principle of existentialism, Sartre says that freedom/responsibility is the basic aspect of existentialist philosophy. He assumes that man is as responsible as he is free. This is the freedom of responsibility and choice. In the novel, Jack thinks that everything takes place as if he was forced to be responsible. He feels he is abandoned in the world. After he faces the realities through Tyler, he finds himself suddenly alone and without any help engaged in a world that makes him feel the burden of whole responsibility. And the flaws of modernism limit freedom through fear and despair. Jack’s essence lives a detachment and estrangement from other people as he realizes that he lives in a depersonalized society. While he is struggling between duality (himself and his essence; his inner self), he lives with a split between the conscious and unconscious parts of his mind. He becomes an ‘outsider’ in American life which is a really difficult thing to be.

In America, Jack sees how people consume everything in the global world. People define themselves according to the things they own. People waste their time on window-shopping and spending their money on materials. Everything they buy is considered as a necessity. While Jack was one of those people, Tyler overthrows everything by showing Jack that “he is not his job, he is not how much money he has in the bank, he is not the car he drives, he is not the contents of his wallet and he is not a ‘beautiful and unique snowflake’”. When Jack realizes the realities, he says, “this is your life and its ending one minute at a time” (Palahniuk, 87). After he realizes this, he begins to suffer from an existential crisis. His crisis demonstrates how consumerism has a huge influence on creating lost and empty selves. Jack wants to get rid of this influence and he asks Tyler:

“What kind of dining set defines me as a person?”
Tyler answers, “we are the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no great war, and our great war is a spiritual war, and our great depression is our lives. We’ve all been raised on television to believe that one

day we'd all be millionaires and movie gods and rock stars. But we won't."
(Palahniuk, 134)

Jack understands that he has already become a slave of consumerism as well; the things he owns end up owning him. Before industrialization, most people were living in rural areas and they knew what hardwork and self-reliance mean. With the coming of industrialization, after they immigrated to cities, the things they experienced in rural communities were left behind and people began to struggle to have as many possessions as they could. Tyler's "middle children of history" is the generation who consumes and consumes to reach a fulfillment that never stops. After World War II, people soon followed the idea of buying newer and better things in accordance with their deep subconscious desires. The children born after the 60's became the "middle children of history" and this is the starting point of Jack's story as he realizes that he is one of them. His story makes life meaningless and people try to escape from that meaninglessness by becoming 'Calvin Klein' or 'Tommy Hilfiger' as is seen in *Fight Club*. The men in the underground boxing club can't see any reason to exist.

According to the existentialist philosophy of Sartre in *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, anxiety, anguish, freedom, and self-deception are the results of that meaninglessness (94). After the men in fight club finish the fight, they start to feel the intoxicating effects of existence, they start to realize that they are alive. They feel the exhilaration of being real. Fight also becomes a protest toward power relations and material wealth of contomperary capitalism. Jack and Tyler are the two opposing representatives of society. Jack is representative of a generation confined to objects and goods. Jack is passive, detached, alienated and has no desire. His life is domesticated and monotonous. On the other hand, Tyler rejects the impositions of consumerism. His life is an expression of chaos and destruction. Tyler is acting while Jack is thinking. Jack is from the middle generation, while Tyler is from the new generation who provides the collapse of the established order of things. Tyler and Jack demonstrate the two sides of the crisis of capitalism. At one point in the novel, Tyler takes Jack into a store. He pulls out a gun and forces a clerk to say what he really wanted to be in life. The clerk says that he always wanted to be a veterienerian but he couldn't achieve his goal because of a lack of money. Tyler tells him that if he doesn't start to try to become a veterinarian, he will kill him within six weeks. Then he tells Jack that tomorrow will be the best day in the clerk's life because he will have to face what it means to do something about his future for the first time. 'Choice' is exactly the individual act which exists outside the impositions.

You aren't alive anywhere like you're alive at fight club.... Fight club isn't about winning or losing fights. Fight club isn't about words. You see a guy come to fight club for the first time, and his ass is a loaf of white bread. You see this same guy here six months later, and he looks carved out of wood. This guy trusts himself to handle anything. There's grunting and noise at fight club like at the gym, but fight club isn't about looking good. There's hysterical shouting in tongues like at church, and when you wake up Sunday afternoon you feel saved. (Palahniuk, 104)

While fighting, they realize that not everyone's choice is objective because each person is different and can't be constrained by laws, traditions and cultures as Sartre said. They want to be free of monotonous feelings given by laws, traditions and cultures. Also Jack starts to awaken from 'deception'. He realizes that anything which is bound to "age of insanity", causes him to lie. He sees his self-deception. The fear and anxiety in his responsibility lead him to hide his freedom by lying to himself without realizing it. This is the existentialist aspect of "duality" according to Sartre. Jack becomes aware of both his own consciousness and the "other" part of himself that observes this consciousness: His alter ego; Tyler. He explores himself through self-creation in the risk society. He begins to get out of the cultural and social transformation of the late modern world. His exploration of Tyler becomes a breakdown of his traditional ways of living. The accepted truths of traditional living are brought into question. His awareness begins to grow. Then the fight begins in himself; a mind struggle. He lives mental confusion; he becomes disconnected from the past, can't remember the main occurrences in history.

He detaches from the role of modernity. With this awareness, Jack says; "I am stupid, and all I do is need and want things. My tiny life. My tiny little shit job. My Swedish furniture. I never, no, never told anyone this, but before I met Tyler [and joined fight club], I was planning to buy a dog and name it "Entourage." This is how bad your life can get" (Palahniuk, 185). Through the life of Jack, Palahniuk actually refers to the deep fears of modernity such as financial concerns, diseases, wars... etc. The author refers to the collapse of contemporary society through the duality Jack lives. He is one of the people who is affected by the conditions of modern society. This is the 'observation' in the existentialist philosophy that Sartre describes. As Steinberg says, "they are detached from themselves or [feeling] as though they are looking at themselves as an outsider would" (32). Jack detaches from the physical environment and begins to fight with Tyler that he created in his mind. This

is the existentialist choice; he sees himself from the third point of view. In the third eye, Jack sees a spreading nothingness and so he tries to find meaning in the present. However, he realizes that the present swiftly passes. Then he gets away from the 'being-in-itself' which is the term Sartre uses in his book *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, for the physical world. Jack becomes aware of the 'being-for-itself' which is the subject defined by abstract characteristics (65).

After Jack realizes his consciousness, he feels his existence, being alive. Then he understands that he exists by his experience, and this leads him to a choice which is 'freedom'. He says, "we have to show these men and women freedom by enslaving them, and show them courage by frightening them" (170). Jack lives a self-renewal. Until that time, others have chosen for him but now he chooses what is necessary for himself. As James Garvey talks about that, the contemporary world is the "slave morality" because people lose their "creativity" (34). Through choosing, Jack becomes free of these constraints and gets the chance to create new opportunities for himself and the others. He tells this to the men in the fight club and he tries to make them snap out of their sleep by saying, "you are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile" (87). He wants them to leave from external influences through fighting. This isolation reflects both his physical and psychological experiences. His intention is to demonstrate to club members what power exists within them. The big revelation comes at that point. Tyler reinforces the idea of a perfect world in the minds of club members. Jack expresses his ideas about Tyler by saying, "I love everything about Tyler Durden, his courage and his smarts. His nerve. Tyler is funny and charming and forceful and independent, and men look up to him and expect him to change their world. Tyler is capable and free, and I am not" (Palahniuk, 1).

In *Fight Club*, Palahniuk addresses to post-modernism through his writing style. The author uses first point of view in the book. He forms a fractured narrative as he talks both as a narrator and as Tyler Durden. The reader can't understand which comments or ideas belong to the narrator and which thoughts belong to Tyler. He prefers to use very short sentences. Within each chapter the time line moves backward immediately with a lot of flashbacks. It's not certain where the next line will continue again. Palahniuk uses stream of consciousness technique as a post modern writer.

When Jack loses the line between real and unreal, he starts to mirror the world with the eye of the 'observer'. When he looks at from the eye of the observer, he realizes the flaws of postmodern society. He understands the essence of object, essence of time, and essence of existence which are the principles of existentialism Sartre described in his book *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (122). He begins to 'feel' everything deeply as he realizes the artificial aspects of society. The first time he cries in the support group, he says:

This is why I loved the support groups so much, if people thought you were dying, they gave you their full attention. If this might be the last time they saw you, they really saw you. (...) People listened instead of just waiting for their turn to speak. And when they spoke, they weren't telling you a story. When the two of you talked, you were building something, and afterward you were both different than before. (Palahniuk, 107)

He begins to get the point of the view of the 'observer'; he starts to observe the world in the eyes of Tyler Durden. However, after this awareness, he can't control himself because he confuses the line between reality and unreality. He can't decide who he is; is he Tyler or Jack? He becomes half alive and half dead. But between the reality and unreality, he realizes that destruction is his destruction and he is responsible for the collapse of his life and the chaos in the society which is 'freedom of choice' and 'responsibility'. He is not forced to 'be', he chooses it as he is spared from catastrophe. Jack knows that contemporary people have no freedom about creating their identities, because they are taught to want what they want as a cultural training. As Tyler says, "generations have been working in jobs they hate" (Palahniuk, 89). He has a desire to stand against and to be disobedient to authority. Palahniuk shows the division, paradox and traumatic impact of modern society which is an artificial world through the criticism in the book. Tyler tells Jack that the first step to eternal life is to die. But once you die, you won't die anymore, this is our world and we are in the real world, he adds. After Jack realizes that world, he understands that anything people are ever proud of will be thrown away and there is no perfect world (Palahniuk, 115).

CHAPTER III

Taste of Consumerism

3.1. History of Consumption

Consuming becomes a pleasure for most of people who taste it once. Many marketing strategies such as advertisements and building shopping malls feed the taste for consumerism. Consumerism in the U.S. has been a driving process almost since its foundation up to the present. Although the term “consumerism” is used for expressing different ideas, it is first used in 1915 which refers to “advocacy of the rights and interests of consumers” (Oxford English Dictionary). However, when we look at its general meaning, it is seen that it is first used in 1960 as “emphasis on or preoccupation with the acquisition of consumer goods” (Oxford English Dictionary).

When we look at the history of “consumerism” in America, we see that first colonists in America were the ones who rejected material things and wanted a “simple life”. For instance, the Puritans who established Massachusetts believed that material things would make people’s hearts far from God. Religious colonies like Puritans wanted to free their spirits from material instincts. However, in the seventeenth century entrepreneurs wanted to increase their profits and laborers worked much more. Because of that reason, Government interfered in the economic system and elaborated its economic strategies. The economy in years between 1600-1790 was mostly based on commercial production of tobacco. In the middle of 1800s, some people like Henry David Thoreau became against this economic system in the land of opportunity by emphasizing the natural life style “simplify, simplify, simplify”. Through the end of 1800s, consumerism became more meaningful as luxury stores were opened. This was like a start for shopping and consuming.

3.1.a. Labor Union Movement

In the late nineteenth century, following the Civil War, the American economy was to be fixed. Corporations and industries searched for solutions and ideas that would revive America’s economy. They found out that the solution was industrialization. However, many skilled workers lost their jobs because of the invention of steam engines, the expansion of railroads, building factories. Workers had dangerous working conditions, low wages, and hard and long work days. Workers united and formed unions to demand safer working conditions,

fair wages, shorter work days, and an end to child labor. When their demands were rejected, they decided to fight for their rights. Labor unions such as National Labor Union, The Knights of Labor, The American Federation Labor, The American Railway Union succeeded in most of their demands. They led strikes for better working conditions and equality for their color, race, sex, and religion. They protested and became violent. Together people in Labor Unions had a voice and they created an important social status: The middle-class.

In literature, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is one of the most important American tragedies written in 1949. Miller addresses the unlabor practices in America in the character Willy Loman and his family who represent 1930's working class man and typical middle class American family. Willy wants to fulfill his economic dreams as a man in a low status. However, he doesn't accept that he is in a low status. He constantly compares himself with his household and he believes that hardworking is not necessary to become successful in business. For instance, he makes pressure to his lazy son to succeed in business life and his son Biff can't bear this unfair expectation. In his work, Miller describes typical man who is pursuit of American Dream.

3.1.b. Surviving The Dust Bowl

The Great Depression was a harsh economic depression during a decade just before World War II. It started with fall in stock prices which is "stock market crash" known as Black Tuesday in 1929. Personal incomes, tax revenues, and prices fell. Both consumers and producers suffered. Sudden drop of U.S. stock market prices affected farming and rural areas. It didn't only affected U.S. but also the whole world until the late of 1930s. Besides this, in 1930 started a devastating period due to severe dust storms which caused mass immigration from Southern plains. Dust storms destroyed agricultural production which contributed to The Great Depression. Farmers from Southern plains left their homes and struggled with dust, drought, disease, and death with the hope of finding a new ideal land to work. However, they saw that there was no such a land as there were thousands of people who immigrated with the same hope.

The Great Depression period affected writers as well. The most famous novel written on The Great Depression is *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinback in 1939 which describes the consequences of drought, dust storms, and depression. The novel focuses on a poor farm family who were forced to leave their land due to the Dust Bowl. They left their home with the hope of finding work. However, when they arrived on Route 66, California, they saw too

many people who came with the same aim. As Steinback described it in *The Grapes of Wrath*, “the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership... they come into 66 from the tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and the rutted country roads. 66 is the mother road, the road of flight” (123). Route 66 was a gateway to Promised Land for everyone. After they arrived California, they saw that all the camps were overcrowded and families were trying to survive. In his novel, Steinback drew attention to the difficulties the Southern migrants faced and he distinctly showed how those people were trapped between South and North.

When we look at the process of “consumerism” in the American history, it is seen that nineteenth century is the starting point of American consumerism as main elements of industrialization were ready to support consumerist society. Industrialism helped agricultural areas to grow, agricultural areas supported industrial regions. Selling products to the rest of the world aroused growth. Advances in industrialization, manufacturing, transportation, all accelerated and contributed to the “new consumerist society”. By that way, as production developed, businessmen offered new markets for the consumers. They used one of the most effective ways; advertisements which stimulated the need to buy. There was overproduction. In the 1920s, Henry Ford founded the Ford Motor Company and developed the assembly line process of mass production. He developed automobile manufacturing with his assembly line. He made it possible for people to have cars whenever they want by affordable payments. He led a new consumerist culture; the car culture.

In the nineteenth century, capitalist process and the industrial revolution focused on “capital goods such as mining, steel, oil, transportation networks, communication networks, industrial cities, financial centers” (Ryan in Ritzer, 701). Even in the Great Depression period, many people didn’t give up the pleasure of consuming. They went to theaters, concerts, watch movies. After WWII, consumerism boomed again. People started to buy new homes, replace their old cars, have children (baby booms). In the book *Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough*, Clive Hamilton says, “Citizens were told by government and industry leaders that consuming made them good Americans. New morality does not consist in saving, but in expanding consumption” (42). In twentieth century, majority of people accepted consumerism as a way of good life. Mass production grew rapidly and United States became the richest society.

3.2. Feel Good Consumerism and “Make a House a Home”

“Consumerism was the triumphant winner of the ideological wars of the twentieth century, beating out both religion and politics as the path millions of Americans follow to find purpose meaning, order, and transcendent exaltation in their lives.”

April Wit

IKEA is generally set up like a labyrinthine showroom that guides you to livingroom, kitchen, bedroom. IKEA delivers the furnitures to the houses of customers. After you pay, you wait for your furnitures to be brought and while you’re waiting you can eat hot dog and drink coca cola for snack. By that way your wait becomes enjoyable for you.

While you’re walking around IKEA, it’s possible to watch lots of people sitting and saying to eachother ohh! over how beautifully everything was designed in the showrooms. Not only you feel how comfortable the furnitures are, but also you can find yourself looking at completely different thing that IKEA offers than you’re actually looking for. They decorate showrooms by putting all the small things they sell like vase, pillows, plants, lighting.. etc. so that customers can’t resist to buy and they can easily decide to replace their old furnitures with new ones.

IKEA has a good marketing through its “space saving” goods in its very well designed showrooms. By that way customers feel that they’re as if in a perfect home. IKEA gives the feeling that they don’t only buy a piece of furniture but also they buy a life style. Through its showrooms, customers can have ideas about design and style of their own houses. So, they feel that they can make their houses a home. Its all decoration is based on “feel good consumerism.” The customers celebrate consumerism by shopping all the time.

In *Fight Club*, at the beginning Jack is fond of IKEA furniture and then he begins to understand the deconstruction of his self in the consumer based culture. He just searches fulfillment through his constant buying of IKEA furniture. “What kind of plates define me as a person?” he asks. He feels that he is one of the slaves of shopping and then he says, “the things you own end up owning you” (89). Also at the beginning of the story, he holds an

IKEA catalog in his hand. Jack fills up his psychological emptiness through his consuming addiction. In the novel, Tyler Durden talks about the new way of life, “We are products of lifestyle obsession. Murder, crime, poverty do not concern me. What concerns me are celebrity magazines, television with five hundred channels and a designer name on my underwear (164).

Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* demonstrates the desire of need to buy something as a result of capitalism as Zizek describes it through “consumption” and “production” and shows the result of capitalism by exemplifying “the figure of lone monadic individual who, alone in front of the PC screen, communicates with the entire world” in his book *Organs without Bodies* (116).

3.2.a. The Cross-Cultural Consumption and The IKEA Boy

The effects of IKEA consumerism are beyond shopping just a wooden piece of furniture. The consumer products affect the lifestyle and aesthetic taste of people as it is not only a new home culture but also a new social class culture. The effects of shopping at IKEA has a social and cultural impact on people’s life style and personality. After IKEA comes, people feel themselves necessary to buy items that exactly reflects a ‘global’ style. By that way, a person becomes one of the thousands of people who decorate their houses in a standard way. All these IKEA people around the world share the same decoration taste with millions of people around the world. By transforming houses into homes, they form a new social identity. In this lifestylisation process, IKEA emphasises its functional, smart, cheaper materials and designs by offering it to all social classes around the world. The cliché “making house a home” creates a necessity for this transformation and globalisation by driving people to buy mass-produced, standardised materials.

In *Fight Club*, Palahniuk makes a direct criticism of IKEA through the character Jack by addressing him as “a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct.” At the beginning of the story, Jack looks at the IKEA catalog and it is seen that every piece of furniture in the catalog has its place in Jack’s house. His house is like a representation of IKEA showrooms. Even glasses, bowls, dishes in the kitchen are bought from IKEA. And he asks, “what kind of dining set defines me as a person?”. He doesn’t even know when he become an ‘IKEA boy’. He is forced to define himself by a piece of furniture. Palahniuk demonstrates how Jack and of course society consumes IKEA furnishings. IKEA’s role is important in the consumerist society as it makes a standardised way of life for cultures. By that way it makes a big change

in class cultural structure. As a marketing strategy, it tries to meet the demands of local tastes and cultures through its clichés such as “turning house a home” or “a home doesn’t need to be big, just smart”. IKEA becomes a good example of demonstrating the socio-cultural changes as a result of consumption. It is not just consumption for building a new home culture but also a consumption of identities or personalities of people. This is the globalization of the consumer society as people from all around the world adapt themselves easily to an international cultural style.

CHAPTER IV

DESTRUCTION OF SELF-IDENTITY

4.1. Identity Problem

“If you can wake up at a different place.

If you can wake up in a different time.

Why can't you wake up as a different person?”

Chuck Palahniuk

In opening of the book, the main character Jack holds a gun to his own head struggling with his split personality, Tyler Durden. He then goes back to many months ago in order to show how he came to that state. As he is travelling on a plane, he meets Tyler Durden, his other. And Tyler becomes the most interesting person he has ever met. When Jack returns to his house, he sees that his house has been destroyed because of an explosion. He loses all of his possessions, like his IKEA furniture. He feels as if he has no life anymore. After that, the explosion changes many things in Jack's life. He starts to live in a vacant house and that is where the relationship between Jack and Tyler begins. However, Jack doesn't realize that Tyler is not real. This is shown by the fact that he refers to himself as “us” in conversations.

As Jack meets Tyler, his whole life changes. Jack's appearance starts to look awful. He looks as if he doesn't bathe, his shirts were stained with blood and his face is bruised from the fights. The typical man of a consumerist society is a person who lives a life the way consumerism serves it. He doesn't realize what or how or why he consumes. “He is mobile: he has a career, travels in the space of flows, and fully but reflexively participates in consumerism. He is constantly on the move, yet his attitude toward his environment is *blase*. As a spectator of his own life, he paradoxically lives in inertia in the midst of a mobile network society” (Codell, 56).

However, the alter ego of Jack, Tyler Durden is an ideal model man who is aware of everything around him. He is conscious enough not to be influenced by the effects of a consumerist society, thus the opposite of Jack. Jack can't struggle against the effects of society. Furthermore, he is a person who tries to find relief from materialism. So they

represent the two sides of society. Tyler wants Jack to be a real man like him. He wants him to be free from the limitations of consumerist society.

In *Fight Club* Jack makes a definition of identity by asking a question about it, “if you wake up at a different time, in a different place, could you wake up as a different person?”(115). Here he portrays an image of self and a decaying identity. Palahniuk describes Jack’s identity through an interesting statement. He identifies him as a “byproduct of a lifestyle obsession”. He emphasizes his identity or personality by telling what he owns. Materialistic progress steals identities. How can a person have a true identity while his self based upon furnitures? Nobody questions his/her life or doesn’t recognize their selves because everything they know about themselves is dependent upon their belongings. They feel that the things they have are a part of them. Through fighting, men feel the power of their self. They recognize themselves. When Tyler wants Jack to hit him as hard as he can, he says, “How much could you know about yourself if you’ve never been in a fight?” (165). And only through destruction, death Jack thinks that he can have a name, a self-realization; “Everything’s going to be just fine. *BOOM*” (168). He knows that dying means reborn.

Jack’s symptoms of self-destruction starts with his insomnia. He suffers from a severe insomnia and tries to find a solution to it. He attends support groups with people who have serious illnesses. In a meeting he sees someone called Bob. Bob often cries and he says Jack that he can cry as well to find relief because Bob finds relief when he cries. “Trying several therapy groups as a ‘tourist’, he shares others’ pain, which works as ‘catharsis’” (Codell, 56). In his book *Stranger than Fiction: True Stories*, Palahniuk says that Jack becomes sad while Bob is crying again in a meeting and he starts to cry as well. “In a ‘self-help’ moment in the bar basement Fight Club, when engaged in a very different kind of embrace, Jack echoes the sentiment he expressed in Bob’s more straight-forwardly nurturing clutch” (49). Bob says; “Number three pounds until his fist is raw. Until I’m crying. How everything you ever love will reject you or die. Everything you ever create will be thrown away. Everything you’re proud of will end up as trash” (Palahniuk, 201). Jack tries to see the meaning of life beneath these words.

After his joining to the group meetings, he sleeps very well for the first time. At his group meetings, he understands that people who have nothing to lose are completely free. It isn't until jack is able to let go of the idea that there is a way to make himself last forever that he finds relief in Bob’s arms at the testicular cancer support meeting. “Crying is right at hand

in the something dark, closed inside someone else, when you see how everything you can ever accomplish will end up as trash” (Palahniuk,129). However, this isn’t enough for Jack. He still feels lonely and that his life is meaningless. He prays for death every day. He thinks he does the same things every day. He talks to Tyler and Tyler gives him an idea. They form a mens club. It’s called fight club. Fight Club grows and expands. Men come to fight there to break themselves down to the point of total destruction. In that way they break the all limitations and rules of society. They learn to have self-confidence.

Tyler continues to teach Jack. He burns Jack’s skin in order to teach him pain. Tyler says that if there was no pain, no progress would be made in history. Tyler makes Jack both physical and psychological pressure. *Fight Club* “pushes self-destruction and self-loathing to its limits as the men pound each other’s bodies until one gives in” (Nelmes, 275). The aim of fight club is same. Members of fight club don’t go there just to fight or just to give each other physical pain. Codell says,

Fight Club is not merely about physical pain; physical pain is sublated into affirmative joy. Through physical pain a sublime body arises: a living body. Fighting is a way to be hit by life. “You weren’t alive anywhere like you were alive at Fight Club.” Fighting is not a way of saying “I hate you, I want to destroy you.” In fact, the members of Fight Club are solipsists: they only feel the pain in their own bodies. The aim is not to become immune towards pain but to live through it. Being hit and feeling pain is a way to re-conquer life. The practice of Fight Club invokes a life with scars. “I don’t want to die without any scars”, Jack says. Why the body and why the scars? The body is that which is not just a “copy of a copy of a copy”. The scar on the body is lasting. It can not be changed like clothes or like postmodern life-forms can. If the experience has disappeared, bodily harm offers an experience of life (and death). Through fighting, fighters feel the finality of life, and life itself. (65)

Jack Nelmes says, “This destructive force is clearly satirised; the potential for and attraction to extreme violence by disaffected, alienated young men who have no place in society is made clear” (275). Jacks desire for meaning is embodied by his projection of his ideal self, Tyler Durden. But the problem goes beyond that because its not only his life which he perceives as meaningless, but the whole world. One of the core points of Project Mayhem is that “everything you will ever accomplish will end up as trash.” So here is destruction...

Before understanding this destructive force or the term “destruction”, it is important to give point to the meaning of “disintegration”.

What we see on the screen of a digital star –the body, the gender, the matrix of social and cultural ties – is as much as we get. Or is it? Postmodernism brought us the disintegration of the subject, the fragmented receptor constantly in flux. The boundaries between humans and machines are becoming irretrievably blurred. So too have the boundaries between the subject and object, the voyeur and the object of the gaze, the user/participant and the avatar representation of that user in a virtual world. (Codell, 130)

In *Fight Club*, Jack perceives everything he sees as fragmented. After he meets Tyler he doesn't realize that Tyler and he are the same persons, Tyler is he. He thinks that Tyler is a different person. This reflects the disintegration as a result of the effects of capitalism which is “the ultimate negative expression of which is chaos and destruction” (Lewis, 99). Tyler shows what Jack thought to be a life as a contagious disease of consumerism and self-rejection.

The trouble is, that after he throws out that version of his life, there is a vacuum. If Jack isn't what he owns, then what is he? The question lights the fuse that eventually detonates the explosives in the basements of the credit card companies. The crisis in identity of Jack who is “passive, alienated and without ambition”, struggle with his split personality, Tyler who “refuses the seductions of consumerism.” (Nelmes, 273)

4.2. Influence of Postmodernity

In a mass culture which is affected by mass media and characterized by consumerism, postmodernism causes a loss of individuality and identity. Because of how it is seen in *Fight Club*, postmodernism shows the change of mind and also “a catalyst resulting in further change of the mind” (Berghaus, 4). While Jack and Tyler are in the hotel room, Tyler's words reflects an important aspect of identity: “You were looking for a way to change your life. You could not do this on your own. All the ways you wish you could be... that's me. I look like you want to look, I am smart, capable, and most importantly I am free in all the ways that you are not” (Palahniuk, 37). Jack is seeking to destroy himself so he can begin again. He comes face to face with the fact that our personalities are built to last and must be thoroughly

annihilated if anything meaningful change is to be achieved. In one of the most important moments of the story, Tyler gives Jack a chemical burn on his hand. In the book *You don't Talk about Fight Club: I am Jack's Completely Unauthorized Essay Collection*, Palahniuk says that the burn is significant for many reasons, part of which being that Tyler insists that Jack stop escaping from life (This the greatest moment of his life and he is outside!) and to welcome self-destruction sincerely (This is your pain, this is your hand in pain) and most important of all, to embrace the reality of being mortal so close to existentialism. (First he has to know that someday he is going to leave the world) (102).

Tyler Durden is Jack's ideal. The only difference is that with Jack, the fantasy goes out of control, and Jack turns into Tyler as Tyler's ambitions don't become sufficient for the capacity of Jack's imagination. In *Fight Club*, Jack thinks about the words of Tyler Durden and he constantly asks himself the basic questions of life (54). About these questions Paul J. Tudico says:

'Why am I here?', 'Does life have a purpose?', 'Does it matter if it doesn't?', 'How do culture and history help make me who I am?', 'Who am I?' for that matter, and Jack's progress will lead us around the edges of all these questions and thicken into a couple of alternatives for how to think about the central question of personal identity, what makes me, well, *me*? (47).

However, Jack searches in the wrong places at first. He thinks that he will be completed through having more and more things. He says, "I had it all. I had a stereo that was very decent, a wardrobe that was getting very respectable. I was too complete. I was too perfect. I wanted a way out of my tiny life" (Palahniuk, 173). This shows her consumer identity perfectly. In a conversation, Jack confesses this by saying,

Tyler: What are we then?

Jack: We're, uh you know, consumers.

Tyler: Right, we're consumers. *We're by-products of a life-style obsession.* Murder, crime, poverty, these things don't concern me. What concerns me are celebrity magazines, television with five hundred channels, some guy's name on my underwear. Rogaine, Viagra, Olestra...

Jack: ...Martha Stewart.

Tyler: Fuck Martha Stewart. Martha is polishing the brass on the *Titanic*. Everything is going down man. So fuck off with your sofa units and Strinnee green stripe patterns. I say, Never be complete. I say, Stop being perfect. I say, let's evolve. Let the chips fall where they may (my emphasis.) (Palahniuk, 51)

4.3. Jack and The Consumer Man

In *Fight Club*, Jack follows a course. He goes from a catastrophic existence in which he identifies himself by his personal belongings, into an existential crisis, then to a self destruction. It becomes significant for Jack to control his self-destruction. He decides to take responsibility for his own self-destruction and improvement. Then he agrees that "it is only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything" (Palahniuk, 152). As the separation of any object from any identity is definition of alienation, the search for identity becomes the search for the truth, what is real. Also it is a way of to escape from uneasiness and confusion of modernity. When Jack's mind divided into two personality, he talks to himself. Once he begins to talk about his destruction, he says "Our culture has made us all the same. No one is truly white or black or rich, anymore. We all want the same. Individually, we are nothing" (Palahniuk, 134). Through Project Mayhem Jack wants revolution and anarchy. By bombing buildings he wants to bring financial collapse. At the end of the film, before Jack is closed to a mental hospital, his Mayhem Project succeeds to destruct several buildings.

Jack's inner world is full of self-hate and confusion. Through fighting, in one point he destroys himself and he rediscovers his identity and character. The pain becomes a test to enter the fight club. The members of the club destruct their inner world at the same time while they are destructing their body. After an inner torment, Jack finds his identity deep inside. Throughout the book we know Jack as a constantly disturbed and trapped character. However, through this disturbtion, he overcomes his paranoid fear and pain. He thinks that by going through his pain, he can come to the end of the "long search". He becomes one of the awakened people at the end by regaining power over his body and especially his life... The violence and destruction in the book clearly mirrors both individual and social pathology. As Jack said in the book, not only bodies but also cities are in ruins. Everything is ruined in *Fight Club* such as the lives of characters; lives of Jack, the people in the cancer group and the lives of members of the club. By that method, the author shows the ironic relation between the lives of characters and society. Jack's alter ego; Tyler emerges as a representation of anti-society.

In terms of Jack's identity "the homogeneous and coherent self is replaced by fragmentation and dissociation, which effectively does away with the notion of selfhood" (Rausser, 171).

While Jack is in his homogeneous and coherent self, he searches and searches for a more meaningful life through his IKEA goods but after his transition to his fragmented identity, he starts to turn against consumerist society. When he comes home from a business trip, he realizes that his IKEA home has been separated to pieces by a bomb. The destruction of his home becomes a turning point for his transition. After that he begins to search for his identity. About his transition, he says, "every evening I died and every evening I was born. Resurrected" (Palahniuk, 22). The generation of the people who are in twenties and thirties living in the western world, have never experienced a war. Chuck Palahniuk refers to that generation by saying "middle children of history." Instead of a great war or great depression, this generation is in a 'spiritual crisis', suffering from a great war of spirit. Jack thinks that his quest for his self definition can be an important step towards something new in his life. So he tries every way such as to fight with men who are stronger than him. He is sure that he will be beaten up but he doesn't give up as he wants to come to the end of the road. He realizes that his destruction will evolve into something more productive. He knows that having everything doesn't give meaning to life. There must be something else. He understands that if he wants meaning in his life, he has to fight himself, his own identity. Fight club becomes the symbol of that fight as Jack says to the members of the club, "as long as you're at fight club, you are not how much money you have in the bank" (Palahniuk, 229).

Fight clubs begin to spread all over the country. Jack becomes the boss of the clubs and he sets rules about the club such as "you don't talk about fight club", "no shirts", "no shoes" and so on. He tests the resistance of new members. In order to be a member, the men have to give up all the possessions they have because "it's only after you've lost everything [...] that you're free to do anything" (Palahniuk, 110). Jack wants the whole world to "hit bottom." They protest all the things imposed upon them in the social system as he says, "the goal was to teach each man in the Project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control of the world" (Palahniuk, 129). After a while, he feels the power to turn the system upside down. He creates projects for this such as 'Organized Chaos' and 'The Bureaucracy of Anarchy'. He points it out in his poem, "the queen is their slave". He gives assignments to club members. For instance, they will vandalize the big buildings. They take action to break the system. They find their identities in the changes they want to make. As it is

seen, Jack's projects spread, his simulacra develops as well. At the end, he can't escape from the disorder of postmodern society, he finds himself in a mental hospital.

Through the portrayal of a typical consumer man, Palahniuk demonstrates the inevitable self-destruction of consumerist life. Jack is a man who is disillusioned by the self-destructive quests of materialist pleasures. He later understands that material things can't meet people's emotional needs. The possessions challenge the soul and people face difficulty even in making decisions about their lives as most of their decisions are made by societal norms. These norms shape the attitudes and behaviours of the individual in the corporate machine. All the men in the club suffer from depression, unhappiness, frustration, and low self-esteem. After fighting men find solace and become independent and confident by restoring their identities and experiencing a personal transformation. Palahniuk takes his characters from a human-centered approach to life on a journey toward self-realization. His characters warn people against the traps of desires that may throw them into ruin and destruction. His book *Fight Club* is a critique of consumer culture, materialism, and individualism.

CONCLUSION

Existentialist philosophy and self-destruction play an important role in the books of Chuck Palahniuk. *Fight Club* is his best award winning novel, which focuses on the issues of existentialism and self-destruction. The book clearly presents a portrait of modern life with the character who is in a struggle. Most people live in their monotonous lives without thinking or questioning. Even though people express themselves, they define their personalities through the things they own: houses, clothes, cars, and so on. They don't even realize their obsessions. In *Fight Club* Jack is obsessed with his apartment and his furniture. Consumerism makes people addicted to their possessions, as stressed in the book. Palahniuk divides the character into two and forms a split personality to show the influences of consumerist society. Existentialist philosophy emerged as a response to modernity and consumerism. It focuses on the values that form the existence of the individual such as his feelings, thought, and actions. The aim of existentialism is to give man his freedom and allow him to get rid of the constraints of societal norms.

In his book *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre's existential philosophy asserts the idea that "man's existence precedes his essence": "man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (123). An individual constructs his own identity because he is responsible for everything and his actions are formed through the choices he makes. So he has to be aware of his emotions, actions, and decisions as each individual is different and can't be obliged by laws, traditions, and cultures. In his book *Nausea*, his character Roquentin searches for meaning in his life and tries to find his true identity in his quest for a purpose to exist. Roquentin meets someone named Rollebon. After he meets, he begins to realize his own perceptions and consciousness- the "other" part of himself. His freedom is made up of his own choosing. Roquentin struggles while questioning the reality of his existence. However, he knows that at the end he will feel himself free from all the constraints of society. He discovers that every worldly possession will be thrown away. He understands the reason of his feeling incomplete and empty. Sartre gives importance to the term "essence" as awareness; self-knowledge forms the essence or nature of an individual. This knowledge makes the individual free in his search for meaning.

Authors like Allen Ginsberg, Ralph Ellison, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac came to prominence after World War II. They protested the influences of materialism in their works. They emphasized the importance of existence and self-realization. Beat Literature had

a significant influence on spreading existential philosophy. In his book *Kerouac: The Definitive Biography*, Paul Maher says that Jack Kerouac in particular was one of the leaders of the Beat Generation. He questioned existence and self-realization in his novel *On the Road* through two characters who seek themselves on a journey (322).

In *Fight Club*, Palahniuk talks about the “middle children of history” which refers to Generation X. People who are children of baby boomers. People of Generation X are detached and alienated from society and have an uncertain future. While Jack is talking to Tyler, he says that they are the middle generation. They haven’t seen any great war or Great Depression but they have a spiritual war, their Great Depression is their lives, and they have a war inside themselves. In the consumerist era, the economy progresses by the production and selling of goods. To progress more, people have to produce and sell more and more goods. A person’s standard of living is assessed by his possessions as a result of material growth and prosperity. The wants and needs of people increase. When their purchasing power is not enough for the things they buy, they feel dissatisfied. In this way people become addicted to the things they have. They begin to define their characters according to the goods they have in their houses, not according to the spiritual values they have. In addition to that, personal relationships decrease as everybody is so busy with earning money. People want more and more comfort in their lives. If they can’t get what they want, they easily fall into emptiness and depression.

Palahniuk refers to the effects of consumerism in *Fight Club*. Jack is a man who is unaware of the influences of materialism as he delves into it deeply. When he sees that his condo has blown up, he feels as if he lost everything, he felt himself lost in the universe. He said that his IKEA house was his everything. His coffee tables, say who he is. However, after his relationship improves with Tyler, he understands the reality. They are the people who see themselves as if lost in the universe and who are obsessed with their possessions. They are the ones who define themselves through their houses, cars, furniture, etc. Tyler says that people can’t understand the value of freedom without losing all the possessions they have as they think that their possessions define their personalities or their lives. Because of that reason, first they need to give up their obsessions or addictions to become free to do anything. Palahniuk demonstrates the effect of consumerism on health and psychology by focusing on the illness of Jack at the beginning of the story. Jack has insomnia and can’t sleep. He goes to doctor who tells him that he should try to join a support group. He admits and joins a cancer group. After he goes there a while, his emotions change because of his contact with people

who are near death. He begins to cry with a sick man there. After that, one night he sleeps well, and this wakes him up from the dream he lives in the consumerist world.

In *Fight Club*, after Jack meets his alter ego, Tyler, he starts to see the change in himself. He experiences a transformation in his search for identity. He learns to act according to his rules, not society's. He begins to set himself free from the norms of culture, traditions, and society. This self-awareness becomes a turning point in Jack's life. He calls Tyler his "liberator" because he destroyed his property and gave him his freedom in return. Palahniuk emphasizes the flaws of society and its effects on people. He tells this through the character Tyler. While he is teaching Jack the realities, he says that this generation of people have front seats for the theater of mass destruction. He also emphasizes the possessions people have and he addresses the value they attach to them. After Jack learns the aim of his life, he and Tyler decide to establish a fight club as Jack wants to wake other people from their deep dreams. Jack learns that without physical pain, no spiritual relief can come. Through fighting, men in the club discover that they feel themselves confident, powerful, and most important, free. They don't remember their problems while fighting and this gives them liberation. As fight clubs spread around the country, Jack becomes more powerful. He starts to put rules in the clubs.

After a while, he develops a project called Project Mayhem. In this project, he gives assignments to the members of fight clubs. These assignments are about human sacrifices. He wants people to realize the realities through the threat of death. He wants club members to ask the people around them if they died right now, what would they wish they had done with their lives? Whatever they wish, they have to realize that they couldn't do it because of the constant impositions of society. So they have to lift the pressure they feel from society in order to become themselves due to this oppression. They don't even realize that they postpone the things they want to do and they bear the consequences of choosing to live according to the norms of society and their lives go on like that. Tyler says that their lives may end in a minute, but they are not really aware of that; they still sleep in the soft beds of consumerism. They continue buying things they don't need. They can't draw the line between reality and unreality so they can't express themselves as they are. They deceive themselves in their unreal, simulated world. After Jack discovers that, his mind splits into two and he begins to live two personalities at the same time. He is so obsessed with materialistic values that he only finds relief in his alter ego or in his subconscious. In that way Palahniuk demonstrates

the level of the effect of consumerism on people by making Jack and Tyler a model to give his message.

In *Fight Club*, when once Jack begins to feel the pain of losing the things he has, he begins to learn the meaning of “self-destruction”. He feels this pain clearly, when he sees the destruction of his condo. He tells this by saying that it is not the thing which was destroyed, it was himself! Palahniuk uses flashbacks to move backward. After Jack learns the reality, he confesses how he is obsessed with possessions. He says that whenever he sees a thing that he likes, he wants to have it or whenever he looks at a catalogue, he asks himself which dining set is suitable for him. He explains how bad his situation is. Once he realizes his situation through the blowing up of his house, he understands that he has to accept destruction if he wants to make progress in his quest for his real identity. One day Tyler burns Jack’s hand and says that this is pain and hand, not someone else’s. So he has to feel the pain and accept that reality because he has to destroy all the things he is obsessed with or addicted to. If he doesn’t, he knows that he will continue to be one of the slaves of capitalism. Also he is aware of the fact that after he has lost whatever he has, he will be free. After he learns that he wants other people to destroy themselves. He wants them to know that through pain they will be reborn. However, he can’t succeed since all of them come from his imagination. In the personality of Jack, Palahniuk makes Jack and his alter ego Tyler a model for society.

Palahniuk demonstrates the importance of responsibility through the choices of Tyler and Jack. The author develops two different lifestyles and points of view in Jack and Tyler. The reader sees what happens to people in the situation of Jack and in the situation of Tyler. Jack represents average people in consumer society, and Tyler represents the small group of people who are aware of themselves and their identities. Before Jack didn’t realize that he chose his own lifestyle, his job, his house. After he became Tyler he understood that he chose everything. It was he who made his life and himself terrible. If he were aware of these realities, he would know who he is and what defines himself. Maybe he would sleep well or he wouldn’t work in the job he hated. He would know the games of his materialistic era. But in his new identity, he becomes a man who is aware of himself. He learns that without sacrifice, without pain, he would have nothing, so that self-destruction is the key answer in his spiritual journey. After Tyler burns Jack’s hand, he begins to say that he is going to his cave; he doesn’t want that, but Tyler says that he can’t deal with the problem the way ‘dead’ people do: he is different and he can’t be like them. Tyler also adds that he has to give up all the

things he is obsessed with and he must consider that he is going to die some day. Then Jack accepts to continue with Tyler.

After Project Mayhem, everything begins to get out of control. Jack can't control the things Tyler does. He knows that he won't exist anymore since Tyler will take over his personality. Jack destroyed all the perceptions he had before and replaces them with the point of view of Tyler. He dreams that he will break up his civilization one day and he thinks that he will make something better out of the world. He remembers the things Tyler said to him such as "only after disaster can we be resurrected" or "what would you wish you'd done before you died?". However, he realizes that Tyler is actually him. After that he wants to kill himself but he finds himself in a mental hospital. Throughout the book Palahniuk shows the two sides of everything: life and death, being and non-being, freedom and non-freedom, etc. His two characters represent the duality in the contemporary era. Through Jack's mental struggle, his trying to contact the outside world, and his desire to wake other people up, the author demonstrates the influence of materialism perfectly.

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